

## **\$400 MILLION WIND PROJECT NEAR ETHRIDGE UNDER WAY**

*By Karl Puckett*

Work on what will be Montana's largest wind farm is under way in Glacier and Toole counties.

The 210-megawatt Glacier Wind Project is owned by NaturEner USA, whose global headquarters are in Spain.

"It's a beehive of activity," said state Sen. Jerry Black of Shelby, who has been a big proponent of wind development in northcentral Montana.

About 60 workers are on the site, including subcontractors, said Bill Alexander, the company's chief development officer. Over the next couple of months, the work force will expand to 200.

The cost of the project is about \$400 million.

"We're on a pretty compressed timeline and the level of activity is very high," Alexander said.

The facility, which will employ 15 to 20 people, is scheduled for completion in November.

Roads currently are being graded; workers are digging holes 40 feet in diameter, where the towers will go; and concrete is being poured.

The generators are being manufactured in an Iowa facility owned by Spain-based Acciona. They are scheduled to arrive on site, via U.S. Highway 2, in sections beginning the first week in May.

The towers and blades are being made primarily by a company in North Dakota, Alexander said.

Once completed, the wind farm will have 140 of the 265-foot-tall towers. The 24,000-acre wind farm spans the border of Glacier and Toole counties south of Ethridge.

A 20-acre construction site headquarters already has sprung up. The general contractor is M.C. Mortenson Co. of Minneapolis.

"We asked the general contractor to use as much local contracts and local contractors as possible," Alexander said. "They did a good job of seeking out Montana companies to use."

The Judith Gap wind farm, currently the state's largest, produces 135 megawatts of power. Alexander said the 210-megawatt Glacier farm could be expanded in the future if additional transmission capacity becomes available. The company has secured capacity on the Montana Alberta Tie Line, a proposed transmission line between Great Falls and Lethridge.